

## Op-Ed for World AIDS Day

December 01, 2015

As we celebrate World AIDS Day 2015, imagine a world in which we have everything we need — the tools, science, and shared goals — to reduce new HIV infections by 90 percent among our women, men, and children. Imagine that, for the first time since discovery of the virus, we achieve an AIDS-free generation. The elimination of HIV as a threat to public health, something once inconceivable, is now achievable. But we must, as a global community, seize the opportunity to reach it.

This is the moment for us to focus on implementing programs that enable control of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Over the last 15 years, we achieved remarkable results working together toward the Millennium Development Goals. Today, we must stand together and demonstrate our collective resolve to meet the challenge we identified when we agreed to the new Global Goals: to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

The United States continues to lead the battle against HIV/AIDS worldwide, not just through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the largest commitment by any nation to combat a single disease, but by being the biggest donor to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM). Through PEPFAR initiated by President George W. Bush, the U.S. government has committed nearly \$65 billion in order to support the HIV/AIDS response globally, including nearly \$50 billion since the start of the Obama Administration.

In the Republic of Congo, the United States funds HIV prevention, care and treatment activities primarily through the Global Fund, which has disbursed over USD \$40 Million to-date, and has just approved more than USD \$21 Million of funding for its national HIV and Tuberculosis programs for the next two years, focusing particularly on ensuring that its most vulnerable populations like girls and young women have access to life-saving services. Additionally, the United States collaborates with the Congolese military through its Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention program, supporting HIV research and providing prevention services for Congolese military personnel.

Last year according to the World Health Organization (WHO) , the disease was the biggest cause of death in Congo and, combined with malaria and tuberculosis, caused the largest socioeconomic burden due to premature death and morbidity. Controlling the epidemic is a shared responsibility, and we have a moment right now to ensure that every person diagnosed with HIV is prioritized for treatment immediately, as per the new WHO guidelines. Access to free HIV treatment is essential, not just to save the lives of infected individuals, but also to greatly reduce new infections.

Earlier this year, President Obama set a bold course for PEPFAR by announcing new HIV prevention and treatment targets for 2016 and 2017. By the end of 2017, PEPFAR will support 12.9 million people with life-saving HIV treatment and provide 13 million male circumcisions, which helps to reduce significantly HIV transmission. This World AIDS Day, we salute the Republic of Congo's initiatives to focus particularly

on reducing stigma and promoting improved HIV testing, prevention and care services for its young girls and women. We too share this mission. Indeed, President Obama also announced that PEPFAR is now investing nearly half a billion dollars to support an AIDS-free future for adolescent girls and young women.

Achieving these goals will not be easy. To reach them, we all must share responsibility and resolve to strengthen our efforts. We all know what we must do to achieve epidemic control. Working in partnership, the world has come a very long way since the darkest days of the epidemic, but the work is far from done.

Today, we invite host government leaders, scientists, civil society, faith-based organizations, and the private sector to all join together in solidarity to end the HIV epidemic and create an AIDS-free generation where no one is left behind. Only by working together will this happen. Together, we can ensure that all our people know their HIV status, and that all those who are HIV+ get, and stay on, life-saving treatment. The time to act is now.



Picture of the U.S. Ambassador Stephanie Sullivan, the Minister of Health Francois Ibovi, WHO Country Representative Dr. Diallo, and the Ministry of Health Cabinet.



Picture of the U.S. Health and Human Services Deputy Assistant Secretary of Global Health, Dr. Mitchell Wolfe, with the Congolese Persons Living with HIV network-- Réseau National des Positifs au Congo (RENAPC).